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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 001109

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/20

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SUBJECT: President Funes Working Toward Honduras Solution, Fighting
FMLN Demons

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Blau, Charge d Affairs; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. Summary: President Funes told visiting WHA DAS Julissa Reynoso he is prepared to participate in an urgent regional diplomatic initiative to resolve the Honduran political crisis. Funes said Salvadoran recognition of President-elect Lobo depended on the joint resignations of Micheletti and Zelaya and the granting of amnesty for the parties involved. Funes reiterated his strong support for the U.S.-El Salvador bilateral relationship, despite radical public statements made by some FMLN members of his government. Funes fumed over the seeming inability of some FMLN members of his government to separate party positions from positions of the State, requiring the President to "face his internal demons" and publically rebuke senior FMLN members of government. Funes recognizes his high public approval ratings could provide the opportunity to form a new center/center-left party for voters who support him and his policies, but not the FMLN or a weakened ARENA. End Summary.

Honduras

¶2. (C) During a December 18 meeting, President Funes told WHA DAS Julissa Reynoso he is working steadily toward a regional solution in Honduras. Funes said that with his blessing, President Antonio Sacá traveled to Tegucigalpa to speak with President-elect Lobo on December 17 concerning the rapid formation of a unity government that did not include Manuel Zelaya or de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti. Agreeing with DAS Reynoso's strategy of urgent and vigorous regional engagement, Funes said he and President Colom of Guatemala would be willing to lead a public Central American initiative to work with Lobo toward implementation of the rest of the San Jose-Tegucigalpa Accord. DAS Reynoso offered USG support for this approach and undertook to closely coordinate USG policy with the GOES, to maximize the political effect of the regional initiative.

¶3. (C) Funes told DAS Reynoso he was confident Lobo would be able to achieve an "internal agreement" among the parties to resolve the current crisis quickly. He offered to dispatch Foreign Minister Hugo Martinez to Honduras to speak with Lobo, as part of a joint intervention with Guatemala's Foreign Minister Heráldo Rodas. Funes said that meeting would lay the groundwork for a joint Funes-Colom meeting in El Salvador or Guatemala with President-elect Lobo to press for their political redlines: a) that Micheletti and Zelaya both step down quickly from their positions of power, and b) granting of amnesty to allow Zelaya a way out of

the crisis without prosecution. Funes added that other regional leaders, even including President Ortega, agree the Honduras crisis must be resolved as soon as possible.

Relations with the United States

14. (C) President Funes repeated privately what he has been saying over and over lately to the press and in public: that El Salvador views the United States as its key strategic partner and values the strong relationship between the two countries. Funes assured DAS Reynoso he was clearly in charge of foreign policy, and said that under no circumstances would he allow El Salvador to join ALBA. Funes added that the political crisis in Honduras started when Zelaya permitted Chavez to exert too much influence. Chavez's having publicly insulted the Honduran public, with Zelaya's apparent blessing was, to Funes, an ugly scene that he would never permit in El Salvador. When asked by DAS Reynoso how the USG can help to further solidify the bilateral relationship across the political spectrum in El Salvador, Funes said the actions taken by the USG that support successful development initiatives will reinforce Funes's pragmatic policies. The Charge noted that during a recent lunch, FMLN party leaders recognized they have no

SAN SALVAD 00001109 002 OF 002

significant concerns over USG policies related to El Salvador, and that their differences with the U.S. relate U.S. policies in Honduras and Colombia.

Internal Politics

15. (C) Funes told DAS Reynoso he was frustrated by the FMLN's continued radicalism and the seeming inability of senior FMLN members of government to separate political positions of the party and political positions of the State. Funes said recent statements made during trips (not State visits, Funes pointed out) to Cuba and Venezuela by Vice President and Minister of Education Salvador Sanchez Cerin forced Funes to "once again face my internal demons" and publically rebuke the Vice President. Funes admitted that hard-line elements of the FMLN will never give up on joining ALBA or pulling closer to Chavez. He noted that FM Martinez, on direct instructions from Funes, had to step out of the FMLN party convention on December 13 when the party voted in support of 21st Century Socialism and joining ALBA. Funes said he had hoped that the FMLN would moderate with its participation in government, but recognized that this was not happening. He said the FMLN still could exert pressure against him via votes in the legislature, or by other means, so he had to think of creative ways to make use of his 80-percent popularity for political gain. Pointing out that ARENA was disintegrating, he said it was time to seriously consider building a center or center-left party that reflected the public's disaffection with both FMLN and ARENA.

Comment

¶6. (C) Withholding El Salvador's recognition of President-elect Lobo provides a useful fulcrum for Funes and Colom to exert leverage toward a comprehensive solution to the crisis in Honduras. Funes and Martinez appreciated the USG support for their initiatives provided by DAS Reynoso, and expressed optimism that the crisis could be resolved with time. Funes also appeared very confident that his popularity would keep the FMLN hard-liners in check. There is a political vacuum available in the center/center-left for a new party to capture what Funes called the "silent majority" of voters who support him but who do not support ARENA or the FMLN. Regardless, DAS Reynoso's interlocutors expressed support and appreciation for the strong bilateral relationship shared between the U.S. and El Salvador. End Comment.

¶7. DAS Reynoso cleared this message.
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